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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Assistant Director for National Estimates

SUBJECT: Contribution to NIE 11-4-58: Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies 1958-1963

1. The following is submitted as an informal contribution by the Geographic Research Area to IV-A of the terms of reference for NIE 11-4-58: Soviet Estimate of Military Situation (advantages of the location of the USSR as regards warfare against the United States).

The values of location are constantly changing. Short of total war, the location of the USSR places it in a dominating strategic position. Its extensive landmass, straddling the Eurasian Continent and abutting on 12 nations, makes it a leading land power to the Northern Hemisphere.

On the west, a chain of satellite states stretches from the Baltic to the Black Sea. This buffer facilitated the establishment of the Warsaw Alliance, which ties each country to the Soviet Union militarily. The Alliance is reinforced by Soviet troops or military advisors stationed within the satellite country, and is backstopped by Soviet forces in the adjacent Soviet border areas. The concentration of military might also serves as an instrument for political and economic domination of the satellites. The major surface transportation links are the east-west railroads that lead from the Soviet Union to each of the satellite countries. These lines are more direct than the north-south routes linking

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the satellite countries to each other. Although Finland is not a satellite, its political and economic policies also are strongly influenced by proximity to and activity of the USSR.

The boundaries of the USSR in the southwest, except for the relatively short boundaries with Turkey and Pakistan, are shared with countries which are not "neutral" in the current political sense but are in effect "neutralized" by proximity to the Soviet Union. Iran, though pro-Western and a member of the Baghdad Pact, has a vulnerable border of 900 miles in common with the USSR, and so finds it expedient to subdue all overt aggressiveness toward the Soviet Union. Afghanistan, with a Soviet boundary 1200 miles long, is not hostile to the West but is an area of increasing Soviet economic activity, military assistance, and political penetration. Along the two sides of this southern border the peoples are similar and their living conditions are much the same. This places the Soviet Union in a strong position of influence unattainable by distant Western nations with a level of development and standard of living far beyond the reach of the Near East.

To the southeast and east is Red China, the most powerful Soviet partner in the Communist bloc. The two countries have a common boundary 3500 miles long, thus the longest international boundary of the Soviet Union is shared with a friendly nation.

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Red China is oriented toward Moscow through strong economic ties and military associations. That it is less strongly dominated by the Soviet Union than are the western satellites in no way reduces China's political and economic isolation from the Western World. With the exception of a rail line originating in North Korea and another in Hong Kong, the only rail lines entering Red China originate in the Soviet Union -- two directly and one each through the Mongolian Peoples Republic and North Korea. A third direct line from the Soviet Union is under construction. The Mongolian Peoples Republic, an enclave between the USSR and China, is virtually under Soviet domination.

In the north, the USSR has 6000 miles of coastline. Difficult physical conditions and great distances rather than international relations have for many decades been the major concern of the Soviets in this region. Recently, however, the skyways of the Arctic have opened up a new frontier with nations of the Western Hemisphere. No longer is the USSR isolated from and inaccessible to the United States, but it is still questionable whether this new relationship can be defined as a locational advantage or disadvantage in times other than those of total war against the United States.

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2. We should welcome any comments or further requests that you may have.

[redacted]
Assistant Director
Research and Reports

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